

Background of the Mahar Buddhist Conversion

ELEANOR ZELLIOT

University of Pennsylvania

On October 14, 1956, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar,* a Mahar Untouchable by caste, became a convert to Buddhism at the hands of Mahasthaveer Chandramani, the oldest Buddhist Bhikshu (monk) living in India. Dr. Ambedkar then conducted a conversion ceremony for the several lakhs of people (estimates run from 300,000 to 600,000), most of them Mahars, gathered on a field on the outskirts of Nagpur. Dr. Ambedkar died in December of the same year, but the conversion movement spread across Maharashtra, resulting in a count of 2,789,501 Buddhists by the time of the 1961 census—7.05 per cent of that state's population.¹ Smaller groups, most of them from Untouchable castes outside Maharashtra, also recorded themselves as Buddhist, making a total of 3,250,927 in India as a whole, in contrast to the 180,823 noted in the previous census.²

Although the announcement of the census figures caused considerable surprise in India, the conversion itself was long prepared for by the Mahars. An announcement that he no longer considered himself a Hindu was made by Ambedkar in 1935, and a Mahar

* Dr. Ambedkar (1891-1956) began to emerge as the chief leader of the Mahar caste shortly after his return from England in 1923. From then on, he combined his efforts to reform, organize, and uplift the Untouchables with a career as lawyer, teacher, writer, legislator, and member of both the last British and the first Independent Indian cabinets. (The only full English treatment of his life is Dhyanjayy Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar, Life and Mission* (2d ed.: Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1962). Although he was recognized as a spokesman for the Untouchables on a national scale, his movement never involved all, or even a majority, of India's scheduled castes. The focus of this paper is on the religious movement, intertwined with the political, in Maharashtra alone. My somewhat enlarged study of Buddhism and politics in Maharashtra will appear in the forthcoming *Religion and Politics in India*, edited by Donald E. Smith (Princeton).

conference held in Bombay the following year committed the caste to conversion. The religious movement coincided with a political movement, both expressions of the same modernizing trend among the Mahars. In the same year, 1936, as the Mahar conference, Ambedkar founded the Independent Labour party. Although it included several caste Hindus on the executive committee and among its candidates, the party was largely Mahar in composition. The Independent Labour party, along with the conversion movement, represented the position taken by the Mahars to attempt to raise their status. This was an effort independent of both Hinduism and the Congress.

The Mahars, the largest scheduled caste in Maharashtra, are scattered in villages all over the Marathi-speaking area. Their traditional work was as inferior village servants, part of a group including the highly placed *patil* (village head) and *kulkarni* (village accountant) which served the village as a whole and was paid by the village. The Mahars' duties included acting as village watchmen, calling landowners to pay land revenue, serving as guides and messengers to government servants, escorting the government treasury, repairing the *choudi* (village hall) and the village wall, sweeping the village roads, carrying letters to other villages, bringing fuel to the burning ground, removing the carcasses of dead cattle, and, rather surprisingly, arbitrating in boundary disputes.³ Pay for these services was in the form of *baluta*, grain or gifts in kind, and the Mahar *balutedars* (those who received *baluta* for regular services) were also in possession of small amounts of land in recognition of their attachment to the village. Among the perquisites of their position were the hides and flesh of the dead cows they were charged with removing from the village. In the manner of Untouchables all over India, they ate carrion beef, a practice which in the Hindu mind was justification for untouchability and which, in consequence, was one of the early targets of those Untouchables attempting to improve their social and religious status. Although only a few of the Mahars' duties involved unclean work (they did not do the scavenging which was the traditional work of the Bhangi in the North), the touch and in some areas the shadow of the Mahar was polluting, and they did their work without coming into direct contact with a caste Hindu or entering a Hindu home. The temple, the school, and the village well were closed to them. Some restric-

tions in clothing, ornaments, metal household wares, and the observance of ceremonies were enforced. The Mahar role in village festivals was clearly specified and generally, though not always, indicative of their inferior status.

The Mahar movement upward began at about the turn of the century. In contrast to the traditional work of the other important Maharashtrian Untouchable castes, the Mangs, who did rope making and basketry, and the Chambhars, who were leather workers, the Mahar traditional duties did not retain their importance in a changing India. With the coming of the British and the spread of new methods of communication, justice, and government, the Mahar was faced with both dwindling importance in the village and new opportunities to make a living on the docks and the railways, in the mills and such government industry as ammunition factories, and in road building. Most important of all in the production of a new viewpoint and new leadership were service in the British army and in British homes. The early twentieth-century spokesmen for the Mahars, especially in the western part of Maharashtra, were often from army families or in British domestic service.

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar himself was born in 1891 in Mhow, where his father was a teacher in an army normal school. Subedhar-major Ramji Sakpal (Ambedkar's own last name was bestowed on him by a teacher later) was of the last generation of Mahars to be able to take the army path to economic security and higher status. Reorganization of the British army in 1893 on a class and "martial race" basis closed the door to Mahar recruitment. The importance of this service and the rising ambition of the Mahars are both illustrated in two petitions for reinstated recruitment. The first, drawn up in 1894 but not sent, was written on behalf of Parwari (Mahar), Moci (Chambhar), and Mang soldiers (all Untouchable castes) by the Anarya Doshpariharak Mandli (Non-Aryan Group for the Removal of Wrongs) and pleaded for the resumption of the privilege of serving in the army. Its author was representative of the new Mahar leadership: Gopal Baba Walangkar, an army man, was active in an attempt to develop Mahar priestly leadership, and had begun the first, short-lived newspaper published by an Untouchable in Maharashtra, *Vitavidhvansak*, in 1888.⁴

The second petition, drafted by Shivram Janba Kamble, a

Poona Mahar who served as a butler in a British club, was sent to the Earl of Crewe, Secretary of State for India, in 1910, but evidently received no official attention. The petition, a long and rather sophisticated document, appealed for places in public service, the police, and the army on grounds of former Mahar service, English justice, and human worth.⁵

Although army service was not opened again to the Mahars until the Second World War, the image of themselves as a martial race continued strong, and seems to be one of the major factors in producing the Mahar *élan*. Ambedkar, whose family came from Ramagiri district, Shivram Janba Kamble of Poona, and G. M. Thaware of Nagpur, Mahars from three distinct areas of Maharashtra, all referred to the Mahar military past in their efforts to evoke unity and action. But, except for the first army petition in 1894, the Mahar use of former military prowess as a factor in building caste pride and unity did not involve the claim of former Kshatriya (warrior) status, as in the attempts of other rising lower castes to gain higher status.⁶

Another common practice among lower castes attempting to improve their position, that of emulating higher-caste religious practices, or *sanskritizing* their behavior and ritual, was followed by the Mahars to some extent, but rather early in their awakening was superseded by a faith in political action and by rejection of Hinduism altogether. There is, however, a religious element in their caste spirit. There has not been a general movement to raise Mahar status by invoking the name of their saint, Chokamela, as there has been among the Chamars of Uttar Pradesh with their saint, Raidas,⁷ but there is even now great pride in the fact that the Mahars, through Chokamela, had a place in Maharashtra's religious history. One of the Pandharpur poet-saints who not only shaped devotional thought but gave form and richness to the Marathi language in medieval times, Chokamela has left *abhangas* (songs) which are still sung by pilgrims en route to Pandharpur, and legends of Chokamela's devotion are known to all who know the name of the god Vitthal. The word "Chokamela" was used as a caste name at one time by some Mahars, and some temples were built for his image, but at the time when many Mahars might have turned from village goddess worship to a higher Hindu form, the political movement and the turn toward conversion discouraged

such a move. In 1929, Dr. Ambedkar convinced Mahars planning to build a Chokamela temple at the pilgrimage center of Trymbak near Nasik that they should devote their energies to removing untouchability instead.⁸ In 1934, when the Mahars of Dehu Road near Poona, chiefly ammunition depot workers, had reached a stage of sophistication which caused them to look beyond the traditional *Marai* (village goddess) shrine common to Mahar quarters and had achieved considerable economic security, they approached Dr. Ambedkar with plans to build a temple to Chokamela. He persuaded them to build instead a Buddhist Vihar (a word meaning "dwelling place for monks" but now used in Maharashtra for any Buddhist place of worship), the first of many now found in the Mahar part of cities and towns.⁹

In addition to honoring Chokamela, those Mahars who were economically better off or in contact with a larger society than were *hahutedar* Mahars tended to join one of the Hindu sects which taught, in some measure, the equality of man as well as devotion to God. The Kabir and Ramanaudi *panths* (sects or brotherhoods) were popular among army men; the Mahanubhav *panth* gained a good many adherents among the Bhavani subcaste of the Mahars, the ritually highest group of that caste in the eastern Maharashtra area. Some individual acts of *sanskritization* occurred. Dr. Ambedkar himself participated in a 1929 ceremony of adopting the sacred thread of the three higher varnas. But in general the Mahar caste used its growing sense of unity and ambition to move out of, rather than up in, the social system.¹⁰ Even as Ambedkar participated in some caste efforts to use higher-caste ritual practices, he expressed disbelief that Untouchables could get their disabilities removed if they remained in the Hindu fold.¹¹

Three temple *satyagrahas*, a concept and a word borrowed from Gandhian nonviolent demonstrations, were held between 1927 and 1935 at Auravati, Poona, and Nasik. They served both to press the claim to a place within Hinduism and to organize and animate the caste, although the latter function was seen as more important by Ambedkar. He wrote in 1934 to Bhaurao Gaikwad, Mahar leader of the Nasik *satyagraha* at the Kala Ram temple, "I would advise the depressed classes to insist upon a complete overhauling of Hindu Society and Hindu Theology before they consent to become an integral part of Hindu Society. I started temple entry Satyagraha

only because I felt that was the best way of energising the depressed classes and making them conscious of their position."¹² With the conversion announcement in 1935 and the beginning of active political efforts in 1936, these efforts to adopt higher-caste Hindu ritual practices and to force entry into temples died away.

The Mahars date their political awakening from two conferences held at Mahad, south of Bombay, in 1927.¹³ While hardly political in character, the conferences were important in gathering the caste together in common cause (at least several thousand attended); demonstrating against the restrictions imposed upon Untouchables (chiefly by a march to a tank in the Brahman area of Mahad where the conference leaders drank from the traditionally prohibited water); denying belief in the Hindu concepts of caste duties and restrictions, especially those which meted out punishment to disobedient lower castes (by publicly burning the chief book of traditional Hindu law, the *Manumriti*); and encouraging internal caste reform. The latter is illustrated by an address Dr. Ambedkar made to depressed-class women at the conference. He urged them to dress well, not to observe caste restrictions in dress or ornaments, to be clean, not to feed husbands or sons if they were drunkards, and to send their children to school. The resolutions of the first Mahad conference indicate less independence than the Mahars later developed: they appealed "to the caste Hindus to help the Untouchables secure their civic rights, to employ them in services, offer food to Untouchable students, and bury their dead animals themselves."¹⁴ The importance of the use of government offices to bring about change, a device the Mahars attempted to use from the beginning of the movement, is shown in appeals made by the conference to the government to pass laws prohibiting Untouchables from eating carrion, enforcing prohibition, providing free and compulsory education, and making effective the Bole Resolution of 1923, in which the Bombay Legislative Council stated that all public places and institutions maintained by public funds should be open to Untouchables.

There are references to education in all these appeals, those to the Untouchables themselves, to the caste Hindu, and to government. The stress on education is one of the most insistent notes of all the Mahar leadership. It was not so much an attempt to imitate high-caste Hindu practices as an effort to better their economic and

social position in an increasingly modernizing society. Caste Hindu reformers' efforts to provide schooling for Untouchables go as far back as Jotiba Phule's schools in the middle of the nineteenth century,¹⁵ and there was among social reformers in Maharashtra in general greater concern with education for the lower classes than among similar groups in the north of India. The difference between the Arya Samaj concern in the north of India for giving the Untouchable a place in Hindu society by means of the thread ceremony, and the Prarthana Samaj concern for educating the Untouchable in Maharashtra, is perhaps reflected in the greater demand among Maharashtrian Untouchables themselves for education. Independent Mahar efforts were noted in the Nagpur area by the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ By the 1920's there were Mahar-sponsored schools or, more likely, hostels, in such cities and towns as Anravati, Bombay, Sangli, Poona, Jalgaon, Nagpur, Akola, and Ahmadnagar. The Christian mission schools, particularly in Ahmadnagar and Nagpur districts, also encouraged Mahar education, with an effect beyond those who converted to Christianity.

Along with the interest in education and the increasing self-consciousness of the caste as a united group went the effort to inform Mahars through their own newspapers. Mahars in the three centers of Poona, Nagpur, and Bombay all produced newspapers in Marathi by 1920. Kisan Fagu Bansode founded one in Nagpur in 1902, Shivram Janba Kamble another in Poona in 1909, and Ambedkar a third in Bombay in 1920, even though the Mahar literacy rate at the time was less than 3 per cent.¹⁷

The education of Dr. Ambedkar* was itself a constant source of encouragement to other Mahars, and it helped to make Ambedkar the natural leader of a group which increasingly revered education. Ambedkar's education also allowed him to take part in a new kind of political involvement, the effort of lower social groups to participate in the democratization process brought about by the

* Dr. Ambedkar received a B.A. degree from Elphinstone College in Bombay, an M.A. and a Ph.D. from Columbia University, a D.Sc. from London University, and he was admitted to the bar from Gray's Inn in London. His education was made possible by two liberal princes, the Gaikwad of Baroda and Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur. His report to the Southborough Commission was made midway in the course of his education; he was a teacher at Sydenham College in Bombay at the time. At the time of his testimony, Ambedkar was the only college graduate among the Untouchables of western India.

Montagu-Chelmsford reforms after the First World War. The petition of 1910 requesting readmission to the army and the resolutions passed by the Mahad conference of 1927 were attempts to secure government help in the struggle to get jobs and education. Ambedkar and a few other early Mahad leaders also realized that political representation in the government, as well as help by the government, would be vital to the interests of the depressed classes. When the Southborough Commission met in 1919 to determine the franchise for the provincial legislative councils, Ambedkar in Bombay and G. A. Gawai of Amravati, also a Mahad, were called to testify. Both asked for direct representation and a separate electorate for the depressed classes. Ambedkar urged that Untouchables be allowed nine members on Bombay's proposed legislative council of one hundred. He summarized his lengthy testimony in these words: "British rule in India was meant to provide equal opportunity for all, and . . . in transferring a large share of the power to popular assemblies, arrangements should be made whereby the hardships and disabilities entailed by the social system should not be reproduced and perpetuated in political institutions."¹⁸ The Franchise Commission, ignoring Ambedkar, gave the depressed classes of Bombay Province one nominated representative in the assembly, but there may have been some comfort in the fact that the first representative chosen was D. D. Gholap, a Mahad from Satara who had been in charge of Ambedkar's first newspaper.

The attempt to gain a political voice was repeated in 1928 before the Simon Commission. Ambedkar, testifying for the Bahishkrit Hitakariini Sabha (Society for the Uplift of the Depressed), which he had founded in 1924, demanded 22 of 140 proposed assembly seats. He also requested certain rights and privileges for depressed classes: (1) that education should have first charge on the revenues of the Province, especially for the depressed classes, (2) that the depressed classes should have the right to be recruited into army, navy, and police, (3) that for thirty years the depressed classes be given priority in recruitment for all civil service posts, (4) that a special inspector of police from among the depressed classes should be appointed for every district, (5) that there be effective representation on local bodies, (6) that the depressed classes have a right of appeal to the government of India.¹⁹ A similar

testimony was presented to the Simon Commission by the Central Province Depressed Class Association, signed by five Mahars, two Chamars, one Mang, and one Bhangi. Ambedkar spoke for an increasing number of dissatisfied and ambitious depressed class men. Rights and privileges of this character were demanded time and time again by conferences of the depressed classes until Independence.

Dr. Ambedkar's next opportunity to pursue effective political representation came when he and Dewan Bahadur R. Srinivasan from Madras were selected as depressed classes spokesmen to the Round Table Conferences of 1930-1932 in London. For Ambedkar, his nomination meant "that the Untouchables were regarded not merely as a separate element from the Hindus but also of such importance as to have the right to be consulted in the framing of a constitution for India."²⁰ His appointment also extended his fame to every Mahar quarter in the Marathi-speaking area. Untouchable villagers unreached by any other propaganda somehow heard of one of their own being sent to London along with the princes and statesmen. A third effect of the Round Table Conferences was to draw up the battle lines between Mohandas K. Gandhi and Ambedkar over the method of achieving the depressed classes' salvation.

At a meeting of the All India Depressed Classes held in August, 1930, before the first Round Table Conference, Ambedkar stated that joint electorates, provided there were adult franchise and reserved seats for the depressed classes' representatives, would satisfy him. He also paid tribute, although not heartily, to Mahatma Gandhi's moral influence in the battle for rights.²¹ During the second Round Table Conference, Gandhi's opposition to reserved seats and his claim that he himself represented the Untouchables hardened Ambedkar's demand into one for separate electorates. The problem of minorities in the proposed constitution was left by a divided Round Table to the British government to decide. When the ensuing Communal Award announced that depressed class voters would participate not only in joint electorates but also in separate electorates with a double vote, Gandhi began a fast. He felt separate electorates for Untouchables would "ensure them bondage in perpetuity."²² Ambedkar, other depressed class leaders, and a host of caste Hindus met in Poona near the jail in which Gandhi was

incarcerated and worked out an agreement which enabled Gandhi to end his fast. The Poona Pact traded separate electorates for an enlarged number of reserved seats for depressed class representatives. Although both sides were later unhappy about its provisions, it served as the basis for representation from then on. Caste Hindus felt their own representation had been weakened. Untouchables came to feel that the caste Hindu vote prevented them from electing their true representatives. The Untouchables that were led by Ambedkar did not give up their cry for separate electorates until Independence. And there was no further mention of Gandhi's moral leadership, but only severe criticism of his program and his intentions, in Ambedkar's speeches and books.

The natural consequence of the attempt to gain political power was the formation of a political party. The dispute between Ambedkar and Congress leaders over the way in which the battle against untouchability was to be conducted and over whether Untouchables themselves or caste Hindus were to lead resulted in a political party independent of Congress. As the 1937 elections for the provincial legislatures under the new constitution approached, Dr. Ambedkar announced the establishment of the Independent Labour party. Aside from a few caste Hindus who had been involved in Ambedkar's activities since the 1920's, the party was largely Mahar in composition, although that does not seem to have been Ambedkar's intent. In the elections, the Independent Labour party won thirteen of the fifteen seats it contested in Bombay Province, ten reserved and three general seats, and three of Central Provinces' and Berar's reserved seats.²⁵

The conversion announcements of 1935 and 1936, in which the Mahars repudiated Hinduism but delayed the choice of a new religion, and the formation of an independent political party in 1936 marked the path by which the Mahars hoped to progress. The other Untouchable castes of Maharashtra, by and large, did not join the Mahar movement. Most Mang and Chambhar spokesmen did not accept the idea of conversion. One Mang was an Independent Labour party candidate, but in general these two smaller scheduled castes were won by Congress. The Mangs were unaffected by the spirit of progress that had begun to move the Mahars. The Chambhar's traditional work in leather allowed them economic progress within the existing social structure. These

facts, plus deep divisions and rivalries among the scheduled castes, tended to keep other castes apart from the Mahar movement.

Some Mahars, especially leaders in the area around Nagpur, were critical of Ambedkar's announcement of conversion. It is doubtful that any but the most committed of Mahars immediately gave up Hindu practices. But the general acceptance of the idea of conversion among the Mahar people indicates the strength of Ambedkar's hold on their minds, and their feeling of bitterness toward their ascribed place in the Hindu hierarchy. Certainly from 1935 on, there was no Mahar group movement to adopt a caste Hindu practice, or to claim a place within the Hindu society by temple entry attempts. It is difficult to speculate what might have happened if Ambedkar had declared for Islam or Sikhism in the years immediately following the conversion announcement. But either out of a lack of personal conviction, a hesitancy about his following, or a fear that hard-won political rights would be lost, Ambedkar went no further than the rejection of Hinduism, and delayed the election of a new religion for twenty years. The *satyagrahas* that had gone into the *Atmat Satyagraha* for the right to take water from a public tank and into the temple *satyagrahas* were now given to educational and political affairs.

The many rumors of the late thirties—that Ambedkar and the Untouchables would become Moslems or Sikhs or Christians—died down in the forties. Ambedkar became Labour Member for the Executive Council of the central government in 1942, and combined government service at the top with another effort to organize Untouchables politically. The Scheduled Caste Federation was established in that same year, on a broader area geographically than the Independent Labour party but with a constituency limited to scheduled castes. The plea for separate electorates in the party manifesto was combined with an even more drastic idea, separate villages for Untouchables. Later in the forties, as the British withdrawal became a near reality, vigorous *satyagrahas* for separate electorates were staged in front of the Legislative Assembly buildings in Poona, Nagpur, Kanpur, and Lucknow. The British were not convinced of the need for separate electorates, however, and independence came without that guarantee of rights which Ambedkar and other non-Congress scheduled castes leaders felt essential. The creation of Pakistan removed the possibility of

separate electorates for the Muslims, and with it went that for the scheduled castes.

As if in assurance that separatism was not the way, the first Cabinet of Independent India included Dr. Ambedkar as Law Minister, and he secured national fame unrelated to his position as an Untouchable leader by serving as Chairman of the Drafting Committee of India's new constitution and piloting that document through the Constituent Assembly.

The 1950's found the scheduled castes with many of the rights the Mahar movement had called for—reserved seats in all elected bodies, a guaranteed percentage of places reserved in government service, financial help for education, laws against the practice of untouchability. But the failure of the Scheduled Caste Federation in 1952 at the polls, the resignation of Ambedkar from the Cabinet over lack of support for his Hindu Code Bill, and the continuation of ingrained practices of untouchability, particularly in the villages, contributed to disillusionment in the midst of all the gains.

Dr. Ambedkar, in his last years, turned more and more to Buddhism as the answer to social inequality. His interest in conversion had not died, and signs of his increasing commitment to Buddhism can be found in the naming of the first college he founded, Siddharth College in Bombay in 1946 (his own home had been named Rajgir after the city of Buddhist kings in 1934); in his 1950 trip to Ceylon; in the writing of his book *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (begun around 1950 and published posthumously in 1957); in his installation of a Buddha image at Dehu Road in 1954; and in a conversion ceremony he conducted in Agra in the spring of 1956, prior to his own conversion in October of that year in Nagpur. There is little doubt that conversion to Buddhism on the part of Ambedkar himself, in spite of the admixture of politics to the history of the movement, was a matter of complete sincerity. His personal interest in the Buddhist religion goes back to his school days, and he was in contact with the handful of Hindu intellectuals and reformers, Vithal Ramji Shinde, Dharmanand Kosambi, A. R. Kulkarni, who were drawn to Buddhism. There is also little doubt that most Mahars and those from other Untouchable castes caught up in Ambedkar's movement were psychologically prepared for the conversion.

Concomitant with the conversion was a call to establish another

political party. Ambedkar named it the Republican party in token of its being open not only to scheduled castes but to all the dispossessed, including scheduled tribes and the lower castes grouped under the governmental term "Other Backward Classes." Ambedkar died when the conversion movement was two months under way, but before the Republican party could be formed. Ambedkar's hopes for Buddhism as a home for a large segment of India's population and for a broad-based political party were not realized. The Republican party came into being in October, 1957, after the elections, but included much the same group as the old Scheduled Caste Federation. Both the conversion and the Republican party have had some success in Maharashtra, the United Provinces, Punjab, and, to a lesser extent, Gujarat, Mysore, and Andhra, but neither has gained much support outside the scheduled castes, and the majority of scheduled castes remain Hindus and supporters of Congress. Ambedkar's dream in his old age—that in Buddhism India could find a religion of justice and rationality, a bulwark against Communism and a link with other Eastern countries—was in actuality no more than the concept he had developed in the thirties, namely, that the Untouchables should repudiate the religion which denied them equality, and adopt another.

The conversion in many ways is a continuation of the half-century-old internal reform of the Mahar caste. Among the twenty-two oaths which are part of the conversion ceremony are these: I believe in the principle that all are equal; I will not lie; I will not commit theft; I will not indulge in lust or sexual transgression; I will not take any liquor or drink that causes intoxication.²⁴ While it has not automatically lifted the Mahar from untouchability (Buddhist, or, in Marathi, *Bauddha*, is a synonym for Mahar in Maharashtra), it has added a dimension of self-respect and an inner sense of being removed from the constraints of the caste hierarchy. Along with conversion came, in many places, the final abandonment of old *balutedar* Mahar duties, the cutting of the last ties that bound them in the old Hindu social structure. And, as interpreted by Ambedkar, Buddhism adds even more stress to the already high-pitched Mahar interest in education.

As Ambedkar saw it, conversion to Buddhism brought the Untouchable out of the bonds of traditional Hinduism without destroying his Indian-ness. As an English-born Bhikshu working

with new Buddhists put it, it is *pali-ization* in place of *sanskritization*. Whether or not the conversion fulfills that hope depends upon the convert's faithfulness to it, his success economically (and possibly politically), and the acceptance of his new status by the caste Hindu.

NOTES

1. Government of India, *Census of India 1961* (Delhi: B. A. Kulkarni, 1964), Vol. X, Maharashtra, Part V-A, p. 31. In addition to the Buddhists, there are still 782,008 who count themselves Mahars. This leaves that caste, in spite of its loss to Buddhism, the largest scheduled caste in Maharashtra.

2. Government of India, *Census of India* (Delhi, 1963), Paper No. 1 of 1963, 1961 Census—Religion, p. ii.

3. Alexander Robertson, *The Mahar Folk* (Calcutta: YMCA Publishing House and Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 18.

4. A handwritten copy of the petition is in the collection of documents given to the University of Bombay library by C. B. Khairmoday, author of a multivolume Marathi biography of Ambedkar.

5. The petition is reproduced in H. N. Navalkar, *The Life of Shivram Janba Kamble* (Poona: S. J. Kamble, 1930), pp. 142-147.

6. The Jatava, a Chaman caste, are an example of a group which attempted to rise through claiming Kshatriya status, later becoming associated with Ambedkar. See Owen M. Lynch, "The Politics of Untouchability—A Case Study from Agwa, India," presented at the Seminar on Social Structure and Social Change in India, University of Chicago, 1963.

7. See Bernard S. Cohen, "The Changing Status of a Depressed Caste," in *Village India*, ed. McKim Marriott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 53-77.

8. Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar—Life and Mission* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1962), p. 126.

9. Conversation with Dehu Road Buddhists, December 25, 1963. For a description of the Pandharpur sect, see G. A. Deleury, *The Golt of Vitthoba* (Poona: Deccan College, 1960).

10. Moving out, not up, is a term borrowed from Beatrice Miller, who with Robert J. Miller is making a study of Buddhist organization in India.

11. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar*, p. 130.

12. Letter to B. K. Gokwad, March 3, 1934.

13. The anniversary of the Mahad *satyagraha* was celebrated as Independence Day by the Mahars thirteen years later. See the *Bombay Times of India*, March 21, 1940.

14. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar*, p. 71.

15. Jotiba Phule's work for the Untouchables is detailed in Dhananjay Keer, *Mahatma Jotiba Phuley* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1964). Another important caste Hindu reformer was Vitthal Ranaji Shinde, who began a program of educational work among the Untouchables in 1906.

16. *Nagar Settlement Report* (1899), p. 29, quoted in R. V. Russell and Rai Bahadur Hira Lal, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India* (London: Macmillan, 1916), IV, 146.

17. A. S. Rangise, in *Dalitmai Vratpatre* (The Newspapers of the Depressed Classes) (Bombay: Bhausaheb Adsul, 1962), has compiled a list of 120 newspapers published by or on behalf of "Untouchable Society," 100 of them in Marathi.

18. Government of India, *Evidence Taken Before the Reform Committee* (Franchise) (Calcutta, 1919), II, 729-739.

19. *Indian Statutory Commission* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1930), XVI, 37-47.

20. B. R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* (Bombay: Thacker and Co., 1948), pp. 40-41.

21. "Extracts from the Presidential Address of Dr. Ambedkar, All India Depressed Classes Conference," *The Indian Annual Register*, 2: 367-374 (July-December, 1939).

22. Quoted in Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done*, p. 71.

23. Government of India, *Return Showing the Results of Elections in India 1941* (New Delhi, 1957) pp. 28-33, 93-96.

24. The Buddhist Society of India, *Dharma Drekaha* (New Delhi, n.d.). The words also disclaim loyalty to Hindu gods and practices and affirm faith in the Buddha's teachings.

A NOTE ON NOMENCLATURE: The terms "Untouchables" and "depressed classes" were current until 1935, when Untouchables were listed on a schedule for political purposes. Since the Government of India Act of 1935, "scheduled castes" has been the most common term. "Harijan (people of God)," a word adopted by Gandhi about 1933, is not used by Mahars.